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ABSTRACT

A study analyzed recently tenured teachers' perceptions about union reform, examining factors shaping their beliefs and noting efforts of Rochester, New York's Rochester Teachers' Association (RTA) to promote reform and foster new leadership. Newly tenured teachers completed interviews on: the RTA's role; a description of the RTA; what influenced their views about the RTA and teachers' unions; what changes should be made by teachers' unions; RTA efforts that go beyond traditional union activities; teachers' and unions' roles in evaluating and improving teaching quality; RTA initiatives of interest; involvement in union leadership; reasons for becoming involved in unions; professional association memberships; and issues for future planning. Teachers had various views about their union. It was an important source of power but also a bureaucracy. The union's advocacy and negotiating functions were well established in teachers' minds. Far less developed was the function as quality control agent. The RTA had experimented with peer review, and teachers were split in preferring peer versus administrator evaluation. Teachers believed the building faculty representative's role was: enrolling faculty as members, keeping faculty informed about RTA activities, representing teachers' interests and needs, stimulating active participation in RTA work, acting as a consultant to members, and keeping records (SM)

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"Exploring the 'New' Unionism: Perceptions of Recently Tenured Teachers"

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April 25, 2000

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Teacher unions are a powerful force in education at the national and local levels. However, opinions are split on the impact teacher unions have had on public education. Both the 1998 Phi Delta Kappan/Gallup Poll of public attitudes towards public schools and a 1998 survey, commissioned by the organization, Recruiting New Teachers, indicate that public opinion is divided about teacher unions. The Recruiting New Teachers survey found that while 55% of the respondents agreed "unions support setting high standards for teachers," 53% believed that "teacher unions too often stand in the way of real reform."[1] Teachers themselves are not unified in their assessment of their unions and are often ambivalent about their membership in their teacher unions. While some teachers view the union as their primary source of job protection, others believe the union must do more to address educational quality issues.[2]

Since Bob Chase, the NEA president, and Sandra Feldman, the AFT president, were elected in 1997, they have called for their organizations to broaden their focus, and in the words of Bob Chase, to embrace a "new" unionism which would be concerned about

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[1] Lowell C. Rose and Alec M. Gallup, "The 30th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools," *Phi Delta Kappan*, September 1998, v. 80, n. 1, p. 54; David F. Haselkorn and Louis Harris, *The Essential Profession: A National Survey of Public Attitudes Towards Teaching, Educational Opportunity, and School Reform*. (Belmont, MA.: Recruiting New Teachers, Inc., 1998).

[2] Gerald Grant and Christine E. Murray, *Teaching in America: The Slow Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.:Harvard University Press, 1999); Susan Moore Johnson, *Teachers at Work* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).

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improving schools as much as protecting teachers' rights.[3] Recent polls of both NEA and AFT members indicate that there is growing support for the union to be involved in assuring good quality teaching.[4] This vision of a professional union is further explored in the recent book, *United Mind Workers.* Charles Kerchner and his co-authors propose that teachers' unions should shift from organizing around job control and working conditions to focus on quality control and increased productivity through innovation.[5]

In 1995, the Teacher Union Reform Network (TURN) was formed to establish a network of twenty-one reform-minded teacher unions across the country. TURN members support the idea of a professional union focused on improving teaching quality. These teacher unions are at the vanguard of a new conception of teacher unionism which raises many questions about the relationships between teacher unions and school district administrations, about how teachers will be evaluated, and how traditional union rights will be sustained in the context of new contractual agreements. However, as Mark Simon, president of the Montgomery County Education Association and TURN member, has observed, "Negotiating the contract was the easy part. It's one thing to put things into a document. It's another to actually bring about a culture change away from a command-and-

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[3]Bob Chase, "The New NEA: Reinventing Teachers Unions for a New Era," *American Educator,* Winter 1997-1998, v. 21, n. 4, pp. 12-15; "Interview with Sandra Feldman," *Techniques: Making Education and Career Connections,* January 1998, v. 73, n. 1, pp. 18-19.

[4]Ann Bradley, "NEA, AFT Take Up the Thorny Issue of Teacher Quality," *Education Week*, October 7, 1998, p. 6; Peter D. Hart, *Teaching Quality and Tenure: AFT Teachers' Views*, 1977.

[5]Charles Taylor Kerchner, Julia E. Koppich, and Joseph G. Weeres, *United Mind Workers: Unions and Teaching in the Knowledge Society,* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997.

control management system."[6] Teachers' unions have long worked to be teachers' advocates, often in adversarial situations with school district officials. Adopting the function of quality control requires fundamental rethinking about the union's purpose and the structure of well established union roles.

The attitudes of relatively new teachers about these initiatives is of central importance to the success and expansion of teacher union reform. Over the next ten years, there will be record numbers of retiring teachers, as well as growing student enrollments. The estimate is that 2.2 million teachers will need to be hired by 2008.[7] New teacher leadership will come from the ranks of those who have recently entered the profession.

This research project was designed to document and analyze recently tenured teachers' perceptions and attitudes about union reform, to understand the factors which have shaped their beliefs, and to analyze the efforts of one of the TURN network member unions to promote reform among newer members and to foster new leadership. This paper addresses a largely unexamined set of questions. Other than conclusions from a series of focus groups, conducted by New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) with new, untenured teachers, I have been unable to identify any prior related research. The conclusions from the NYSUT project are instructive, as they suggest that the union was perceived as being very marginal, except when there were specific programs for new members. These untenured teachers were concerned with daily survival in their classrooms and with keeping their jobs.[8] Earlier studies on teacher unions have examined such

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6. Jeff Archer, "District, Union in Md. Experiment With Innovative Accord," *Education Week*, April 15, 1998, p. 8.

7Haselkorn and Harris, *The Essential Profession*, 1998.

8 "Summary of New Member Focus Groups," New York State United Teachers, 1998.

questions as teachers' attitudes about unionism in specific schools, teacher union reform efforts in specific districts, and the impact of collective bargaining.[9]

New teachers are also entering teaching at a time when the earlier accomplishments of teacher unions are far less visible than they once were. In a 1992 essay on trends and developments in labor relations in education, Bruce S. Cooper observed, "Most would agree the rise of teacher power through collective action is 'the most astonishing story of our time!'"[10] For recently hired teachers, this story is largely unknown. As senior teachers retire over the next decade, fewer and fewer teachers will have any personal connection to their professional history. Because of their large numbers, the attitudes and beliefs of new teachers will be critical to the success of the teacher union reform effort. As Adam Urbanski, the co-director of the Teacher Union Reform Network and President of the Rochester Teachers Association, observed, "Unless it is the voices from within the teacher union movement who are driving the call for reforms, there is a great risk that the voices from outside would be viewed as hostile 'bashing.' So it does matter a great deal who is calling for teacher union reform."[11] The voices of newer teachers may matter most, as they will soon be called on to assume leadership roles.

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[9]See, for example: Nina Bascia, *Unions in Teachers' Professional Lives: Social Intellectual and Practical Concerns* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1994); Dorothy Kerr Jessup, *Teachers, Unions, and Change* (New York: Praeger Press, 1985); Susan Moore Johnson, *Teachers Unions in Schools* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984); Charles Taylor Kerchner and Julia E. Koppich, *A Union of Professionals: Labor Relations and Educational Reform* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993).

[10]Bruce S. Cooper, "Trends and Developments," in Bruce S. Cooper, ed., *Labor Relations in Education, An International Perspective* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1992), p. 301.

[11]Adam Urbanski, "TURNing Unions Around," *Contemporary Education*, Summer 1998, v.69, n. 4, p. 186.

Theoretical Framework and Research Method

The methodological approach for this project is qualitative. It draws on the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism and, as is suggested by Glaser and Strauss, the development of grounded theory.[12] The central tenet of symbolic interactionism is to comprehend how individuals understand and describe their experience. As reflected by symbolic interactionism, my research interest was to discern how recently tenured teachers perceive the work of their teachers' union and what they expect from the union. Further, I was interested in learning what has influenced these teachers in forming their perceptions about the union.

As data analysis progressed, the central influence of the building faculty representative emerged as a key finding. This conclusion suggested the relevance of role-set theory in this study. Role-set theory suggests that new roles are created by new patterns of relationships in a social structure.[13] As teachers' unions broaden their central purpose to address issues of teaching quality, the role of their representatives in schools, the elected union representative, must change as well. This study suggests, however, that no formal change has yet emerged for individuals in this role.

The primary data collection method was telephone interviews which were audiotaped and transcribed. Questions focused on teachers' perceptions about the role of the union in their work, their attitudes about teacher union reform, their own involvement in

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[12]Robert Bogdan and Sari Knopp Biklen, *Qualitative Research for Education, 2nd edition* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1992); Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1967); David Silverman, *Interpreting Qualitative Data* (Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage Publications, 1993); Peter Woods, "Symbolic Interactionism: Theory and Method," in Margaret D. LeCompte, Wendy L. Millroy, & Judith Preissle, eds., *The Handbook of Qualitative Research in Education* (San Diego: Academic Press, 1992), pp. 337-404.

[13] Robert K. Merton, *On Theoretical Sociology.* New York: The Free Press, 1967.

the union, and the factors which have influenced their views about teacher unions. A copy of the interview schedule is attached as Appendix A.

Data Collection

The study was conducted with the Rochester Teachers Association, in Rochester, New York. This association was chosen for several reasons. The Rochester Teachers Association (RTA) has been a progressive local union since the mid 1980s when the leadership negotiated a reform contract that created a mentor program for new teachers, a professional intervention program for unsuccessful tenured teachers, and reframed teacher evaluation for tenured teachers to include the option of peer review. Adam Urbanski, president of the Rochester Teachers Association, is one of the co-directors of the Teacher Union Reform Network and is nationally known as an educator who believes in union reform. The union has actively worked to foster new leadership through annual leadership conference to which potential teacher leaders are invited and by offering a professional development program called Ulead to help support new teachers.

Like many urban school districts, Rochester is increasingly faced with the challenge of a substantial change in the teaching force as older teachers retire and new teachers are recruited. In 1999-2000, 48% of the RTA membership (which includes professional support staff as well as teachers) were on steps 1-10 of the career ladder. Twenty-three per cent of the membership were on steps 26-36, most of whom will retire in the next five to eight years. Additionally, the district is having difficulty retaining newly hired teachers. It is estimated that 600 new teachers will be hired in Rochester for the 2000-2001 school year in a professional staff of 3500. With these changes, recently tenured teachers, defined as having four to seven years of teaching experience, become increasingly important in the success of union reform. These teachers will soon be the new teacher leaders and their views about the role of their union will be influential in shaping the future direction of the union.

The teachers interviewed were selected through purposeful sampling with an effort to achieve maximum variation. Based on the Rochester Teachers Association database, there were 228 teachers in a regular or special education classroom who had between four and six years of teaching during the 1998-1999 school year.[14] This included 95 primary and intermediate teachers (42%), 41 middle school teachers (18%), 24 high school teachers (10%), and 68 special education teachers (30%). By gender there were 171 female teachers (75%) and 57 male teachers (25%). The ethnic breakdown was 164 white (72%), 33 african american (14%), 14 hispanic (6%), 7 asian (3%), and 10 (4%) listed as other.

Interviews were completed until the point of information saturation. The sample included 18 teachers; 5 were primary and intermediate (28%), 5 were middle school (28%), 4 were high school (22%), and 4 were special education (1 elementary, 2 middle school, 1 high school) (22%). The sample included teachers from fourteen schools, (6 elementary schools, 3 middle schools, and 5 high schools). By gender there were 12 females (67%) and 6 males (33%).The ethnic breakdown was 16 white (89%), 1 african american (5%), and1 hispanic (5%). In terms of union involvement, only 4 of the teachers (22%) indicated no prior involvement with the union. Two teachers were currently serving as faculty representatives in their schools and one was on a building committee, a contractually created committee to address building issues such as physical plant improvements. Half of the interviewees reported having attended one or more professional workshops or conferences sponsored by the union and six indicated that they had received assistance from the union regarding a problem with an administrator, with another staff person, or after being injured at school.

Data analysis began as part of the data collection process as key themes emerged

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[14] Several teachers were interviewed in the 1999-2000 school year and were in their seventh year of teaching. Therefore, the study sample of newly tenured teachers is defined as teachers in their fourth through seventh year of teaching.

from the interviews. Coding categories were developed and were used to analyze the transcribed interviews.

Data Analysis

Teachers have a variety of views about their union. On the one hand unions are an important source of power and protection, particularly when teachers experience a hostile work environment. On the other hand, unions themselves are bureaucracies which can be perceived as mirroring the worst traits of school district administrations. When asked to identify the two or three words which most described the Rochester Teachers Association positive terms such as supportive, powerful, and influential were common; however, critical adjectives including political, adversarial, and bureaucratic were also voiced.

The advocacy and negotiating functions of the union are well established in the minds of teachers. The union is where you turn when you are in trouble. Far less well developed is the function as quality control agent, a basic tenet of the "new" unionism advocated by the NEA and AFT leadership. Teachers are supportive of the notion that the union should do more to assure teaching quality, however, there is little agreement about the mechanisms to assure quality once teachers are tenured. Despite the progressive efforts of the Rochester Teachers Association, half of the teachers interviewed had little or no knowledge of a fourteen year old professional intervention program. The optional peer review process for tenured teachers, Performance Appraisal Review for Teachers, was viewed by many as time consuming, and not necessarily a reflection of a teacher's instructional skills. It was valuable only for those teachers who were willing to seriously invest time and effort into the process. In this section teachers' perceptions of the union's purpose and the variables that have influenced teachers' views will be further examined.

The Union as Advocate and Negotiator

Forty years ago, prior to collective bargaining, if teachers were asked about the purpose of the union, very likely the majority would have expressed surprise at the

question. Currently, the union's functions as advocate and negotiator are powerfully established. There is great consistency among newly tenured teachers, even those who are critical or ambivalent about the union, agree that the union represents the interests of teachers, both individually and collectively, at least in terms of contractual issues. As an elementary teacher commented, "They're your strength when you need them. They support you in certain situations where you need some backing both legally and within the building." A high school teacher spoke about his experience this way:

> I have a lot of respect for the union. They stood up in terms of the way I was treated as a contract substitute teacher. I would never get wage increases from year to year, even thought I would go through the process of acquiring more experience as a teacher. I just ended up getting a retroactive pay on a grievance that was filed. So I benefitted from the fact that they cared about how I was being treated. I think it's important.

A third teacher, who was a faculty representative in her middle school building, discussed her growing involvement in the union:

> I come from a union background so I knew basically that they work for benefits and salary and things like that, but they were never a consideration. And then I was assaulted and the union helped me a lot. As I got more involved with them and saw the variety of things they did, and actually sat down and read my contract, and was subsequently asked to be involved in more and more things, I really see how good they are for education, and I have an understanding of how different education would be without them.

Even teachers who thought they had not directly benefitted from their union membership recognized that at some point in their careers they might need to call on the union for assistance. A middle school special education teacher, offered the analogy of having medical care available when it is needed, observing:

> Am I so foolish just to say I don't want it, because some day I may. And I do want all of us to have the help we need there, so I began to say, well just because you're not sick and seeking a doctor, you're not sick today, but you're still glad you have a doctor, because you know something's coming.

Echoing this belief, a high school math teacher commented, "I think the union is there to provide some job security for us. I think that's very important because there's too many

outside forces and variables in this profession, not to be protected someplace." Without exception the interviewed teachers perceived a need for a union to represent their interests in contractual concerns, in serving as their advocates in administrative disputes, and in supporting them, particularly in cases of assault.

There is a paradox, however, in the very strength of this traditional union responsibility. While the interviewed teachers overwhelmingly spoke about the union's work as advocate and negotiator, those who had limited or no union involvement made a clear distinction between their work with students and the work of the union. The union was perceived as an external entity with a political agenda, which, while important, might detract from their work with their students. A fifth grade teacher commented, "I see it as very political and I'm not interested in the politics of education. I'm interested in kids and having to educate them." Similarly, "I'm just happy to stay in my job, and work with the kids. I'm on a couple committees at school, but I don't get overly involved because I don't want to lose what I'm there for," said a middle school teacher. A high school teacher was even more critical suggesting that the union did not offer any benefit for his students:

> I feel that I need to spend all of my professional time on kid-oriented tasks and I don't feel that the RTA is kid-oriented at all. It's kind of a secondary thing that comes along with some of the other issues that are involved. So I personally would never have any interest in being involved in the RTA because I don't feel that it gets back to the kids. And I think there are a lot of other teachers that feel the same way.

Half of the teachers were not able to identify any impact that the union had on their daily teaching activities.

A few teachers concluded that the union negatively impacted their efforts to be successful with their students, particularly during contract disputes. The relationship between the union and the district administration has been acrimonious for the last three contract negotiations and the relationship between the current superintendent and union leadership at times has been difficult. A high school teacher described his frustration about being

criticized for asking fellow teachers to help his students prepare for a national competition during a work to rule job action during the last contract dispute this way:

> Let me tell you, I got bombarded. I got hate mail. I got threatened. The whole nine yards. How dare you go against the union? And that in a nut shell is the kind of impact it has on the negative side. They get right in front of themselves over issues which ultimately hurt the kids. It takes away from the kids and causes a backlash that way. I see the union as a good safeguard if you have trouble, but on the same hand, they get right in front of themselves over issues.

While most teachers were not as strong in their sentiments as the example above, there were frequent observations about the need for the union to be more collaborative in solving problems. There is a desire on the part of these teachers for the union to be less adversarial and more flexible in its relationship with the administration. Another high school teacher who was completing his first year as a union faculty representative for his building summed up this point saying:

> Sometimes I think the union has to be open-minded. There's a lot of changes that are occurring in the world of education and I just feel that a lot of people that are involved with the union tend to be a little gun shy because so many bad things have happened to them in the past. I feel we need to be open-minded to try to come to a compromise and get things accomplished. Sometimes there are little battles that are fought, that maybe we need to overlook some of those little battles and focus on the big battles. A lot of the problems that we are dealing with, it seems to me it's just a lot of documentation of things, and nothing really gets accomplished.

While the teachers valued the job security and support of the union, an adversarial position with the district administration and a grievance process, which in itself becomes bureaucratic, often are not seen as effective. As an elementary teacher commented, "They seem to be very good at knowing the rules. What you can do, what you can't do, who you should see, where you should go. But that's not really the power of a union as far as I'm concerned. They can be stagnant and know the rules." Another elementary teacher observed:

> One thing that the union might do a bit more of would be to really focus on the positive things that are happening in the district and try to encourage that more, rather than focus on the negative. And if they are going to focus on the negative, I wish they would do it in a more constructive fashion and think of some ways to solve problems rather than just sit around and

complain.

For teachers whose involvement with the union has been limited to attending a professional workshop or conference, or who have had no involvement at all with the union, too much time seems to be spent on documenting problems rather than improving teaching and learning. The union is perceived as more reactive than proactive. As one teacher commented, "It's like a swing set in the backyard that you aren't using, but if one day you feel like swinging, it's out there."

In contrast with teachers who saw little connection between the union and their work with students, teachers who were serving in a union position or who felt they had substantially benefitted from union services identified a direct connection between the union and their work in the classroom. Teachers specifically identified issues such as class size, classroom resources, improvements in the school facilities, and professional development opportunities coming from union efforts. The high school faculty representative who is quoted above lauded the professional development opportunities sponsored by the union, particularly a workshop series designed for new teachers. Other teachers who had attended union-sponsored workshops or an annual professional development conference mentioned their value, particularly in contrast with some of the required city-wide professional days organized by the school district.

Beyond these tangible resources, was the suggestion that the union has a positive impact on teachers' professional well-being and teaching effectiveness. Instead of being perceived as an entity external to the classroom, the advocacy role is described as directly contributing to teachers' work with students. A middle school teacher offered one of the most articulate comments, observing: "There are occasionally times when you need to have a representative. They're with you and they support you in case anything comes up. And I think that helps to set your mind at ease so that while you're actually in the classroom you're

not worried about what's happening elsewhere."

Collective bargaining began in 1965 in the Rochester City School District. Since then the RTA has gained great strength and skill in representing and advocating for its members. The importance and value recently tenured teachers place on this function is clear.

The Union as Quality Control Agent

In the mid-1980s, the RTA was one of the first teachers' association to include provisions to address teaching quality in its contract. By 1998 both the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association had adopted resolutions which addressed the union's role in assuring teaching quality.[15] The recently tenured teachers interviewed for this study --those who were involved with the union and those who were not -- unanimously supported the idea that the union should be more proactive in addressing issues of poor teaching. A middle school teacher made the point this way:

> Well, tenure really is a union concern. The union's job is to protect its members, but there are some people who shouldn't be protected. That doesn't sound good, but in reality there are some people who are just showing up every day. And they pay their union dues, so they are entitled to be protected by the union, but in reality they are not doing anybody any good, especially the students. And I think something needs to be done about that issue.

An elementary teacher echoed this perception saying:

> I think some people go into teaching for the wrong reasons, and I've met some of them. I just don't think that people who are drawing a paycheck and not really contributing should be allowed to stay. That may seem a little bit harsh, but I take what I do very seriously and I see it more as a vocation than an occupation. It's not just a job to me, it's part of who I am. And I don't always see that in other people. I see them coming, doing the bare minimum, just enough to get through and leaving. Never changing anything about their practice, never trying to get any better. Just always doing the same thing year after year after year, which is more or less rote learning and nothing else. And to me that's a waste of space.

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[15] American Federation of Teachers, "Assuring Teacher Quality: It's Union Work," 1998.

Finally, a high school teacher offered perhaps the strongest criticism of nonproductive teachers:

> We have a lot of what I call tenured slugs. They've been there so long and you can't get rid of them and their program has fallen to the ground and they've lost students or if an entire program has been shut down they put them somewhere until they ruin that program. And they can't be fired. So I think that's good if they want to initiate something, some kind of safeguard there, some kind of product control that makes teachers answerable.

Addressing Poor Teaching

Recently tenured teachers believe that the union should be more involved in addressing poor teaching, but they did not perceive that their union has been successful in doing so. This is important as the Rochester Teachers Association has frequently been cited as a national model to be emulated. The RTA has had a Professional Support and Intervention Program since 1986 which is intended to address the issue of poor performance by tenured teachers through intensive mentoring by a Lead Teacher. The Professional Intervention Program has had some success in addressing poor teaching, sixty-eight teachers have been placed in intervention since the program's inception, forty of whom have left the district. Most were voluntary departures, but four teachers' contracts were terminated after failure to successfully improve. Additionally, more than two hundred teachers voluntarily seek professional support from the Career in Teaching Program to help them improve their practice each year.[16]

While the Professional Support and Intervention Program has received national recognition, half of the Rochester teachers interviewed did not know that there was such a program in the district and the rest had only a vague awareness of it. For the most part, it was those teachers who had some union involvement who were aware of the Intervention

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[16]Christine E. Murray, "Rochester Teachers Struggle to Take Charge of their Practice," in *Transforming Teacher Unions: Fighting for Better Schools and Social Justice*, eds. Bob Peterson and Michael Charney, Milwaukee: Rethinking Schools, 1999, pp. 46-49.

Program. However, teachers who were aware of the Intervention program did not think the Intervention Program has been used as frequently as is needed. Two reasons were most frequently offered as explanations for this.

First, teachers suggested that despite the program, it was difficult for the Rochester Teachers Association to find the balance between the functions of advocacy and quality control. A high school teacher said, "There's a system in place but it does not work, it is not effective. It becomes an issue of the union protecting somebody who is incompetent. And I see it around me all the time. And it's really difficult from an administrative standpoint to get rid of somebody who is incompetent, who shouldn't be working with kids." A high school special education teacher, who has been active in the RTA characterized the dilemma this way:

> The union has to deal with the fact that there are teachers in the classroom that shouldn't be there. And in some ways it's the union's job to protect people, but on the other hand, it's also the union's job to counsel people out of teaching if that's not where they should be. I was involved with one person who did not belong in a classroom, and the district spent a great deal of money and a great deal of time trying to get this person out of teaching. She was mentally ill, and she really didn't know what was going on. And then the union, it was just this really long, involved, expensive process and the upshot of it is she is still working for the City.

Similarly a middle school teacher described a case where a teacher had been in and out of drug rehabilitation programs for three years but continued to be employed even when rehabilitation was not successful commenting, "I kept thinking, whoever is protecting her job is overdoing it." While these are single events, they reflect the deep concern that the teachers have about the quality of their colleagues and the view that more needs to be done by the union to address poor performance.

It is very clear, though, that teachers do not hold the union solely responsible. Lack of adequate and appropriate action by administrators is also a substantial issue for these teachers. The Intervention Program is dependent on building administrators who are willing to document the need for intervention and recommend a teacher for the program. One of

the teachers who is a union faculty representative described the pattern of administrative inaction this way:

> The mechanisms are in place to remove teachers who are ineffective and I believe they should be removed, and the mechanisms are in place to make sure that all avenues of intervention have been sought out, and that we're really removing a teacher who is not effective and who should not be in the classroom. And administrators don't bother to do it. And it gets to a point where there's an administrator who is really working hard to get this situation rectified, and she's fighting the fact that for years and years this teacher has gotten adequate reviews. Well, some administrators didn't do their jobs.

With a large district like the Rochester City School District which has fifty-five schools, administrative laissez-faire, which can begin with untenured teacher evaluations, is difficult to address because as one teacher said, "There's a lot of teachers who probably slip through because the City is so big and there are a lot of teachers who don't get the help they need." Another teacher commented:

> What I have observed, and not just in my building, is that a principal will give an untenured teacher a satisfactory observation but the teacher will not stay in the building. So the principal is saying, "They're okay, but not great. I don't want them here. We'll pass them along so they end up in another building." You know, I disagree with that. Because these people, you know they're not good teachers.

Rochester's recently tenured teachers are clear in their view that poor teachers should be identified and given support to improve their teaching, but they should not be overly protected by union efforts if they do not improve. This is a joint union/administrative responsibility which needs further attention to be more effective. While the policies and programs are in place in Rochester to assist and if necessary remove ineffective teachers, the newly tenured teachers believe that more teachers, who are not currently effective in their teaching practice, need to be identified and their problems addressed.

Peer Review

Rochester has been one of a handful of progressive unions who have experimented with peer review for teachers, making the argument that administrative evaluations are often flawed, that peer review is a more appropriate model for a

profession, and that this is another mechanism to address teaching quality. Under the teacher evaluation guidelines, Performance Appraisal Review for Teachers (PART), tenured teachers may participate in a peer evaluation process known as Summative Appraisal or they may elect to have their administrator observe and evaluate their performance. The Summative Appraisal model provides the opportunity for teachers to set their own professional goals and design their own annual assessment process. Assessment might include a portfolio of their work, peer review of their teaching, or a collaborative effort with other teachers.

Every three years teachers who elect Summative Assessment complete a summative evaluation. Teachers write a report on how they have met professional standards in the areas of student learning, teaching, professional development and home/community involvement. As part of the summative assessment, teachers choose two peer reviewers, in addition to their supervising administrator, with whom they complete a structured interview to assess the previous three years' work. The peer reviewers and the administrator are asked to prepare a written report. Teachers who are evaluated as "needs improvement" or "unsatisfactory" in the opinion of the reviewers could lose their annual salary increase and will be evaluated by their administrator in the following year.

Among Rochester's tenured teachers there has been an even split between those who have elected peer review and those who have continued to have their administrator evaluate their teaching.[17] This sample of recently tenured teachers also reflects this dichotomy of preferences, suggesting that peer review is not being as widely embraced as a reform despite the national unions' endorsement. The notion that peer review enhances the teaching profession has not been adopted by many of these newly tenured

[17] "Rochester Teachers Struggle to Take Charge of their Practice."

teachers. Rather, they have taken a far more pragmatic approach in making their performance evaluation choice. The factors of time, their relationships with their administrators, and the perceived validity of the Summative Evaluation process are far more relevant than any assumption about the professional nature of their decisions. Additionally, several indicated that they really had no clear understanding of the Summative Evaluation process so either selected it based on others' recommendations or did not select it because the process was not well explained to them.

Each of these factors deserve further analysis. The time issue is central for these newly tenured teachers, many of whom are juggling the demands of a challenging teaching assignment with family obligations. Additionally, New York State requires that all teachers complete their masters' degrees within five years of beginning teaching so most teachers were taking coursework or had just finished their graduate degrees, adding the third major responsibility of student to their already hectic lives. From their standpoints, it was simply less burdensome to have their administrators observe them and write up the evaluation. One of the union faculty representatives made this choice even though she recognized that the union leadership was advocating the Summative Evaluation process and she valued the formal reflection the process incorporates. She commented:

> I think it's a good theory. I'm not sure that it can be done effectively enough that it would be successful....I've opted out of it because the paperwork system of doing all of that is really bad. And I opted out of it because I know I was trying to get pregnant and it's a three-year cycle and it would have just thrown it all off. And I have a very good relationship with my administrator who understands that even though I am really involved with all this other (union) stuff, my classroom comes first. So I didn't have any hesitation about him reviewing me....I think the problem most people have is that they say okay to do peer review this year but get so involved with their day to day activities, and at the end of the year in the spring, panic and throw it together.... I mean I like the idea, but fitting it in everybody's life is very difficult.

A middle school teacher expressed her lack of knowledge in selecting the Summative

Evaluation and that while it had been useful, she probably would not do it again.

> I got hit my first year of having to do a proposal and I had no clue what I needed to do. So, when I was asked if I wanted to be part of a school-wide proposal, I said sure....It's useful in that it forces you to be reflective with yourself. And I think I was fairly honest because I did write down some things that I truly needed to improve on. And they were the kinds of things that if I were being observed, nobody would know. And I thought that worked out well....Truthfully, as I've seen people agonizing over their summative appraisals, I have a feeling that after I do my first one, I will go back to the administrative review (because of the time involved).

A third teacher who elected the Summative Evaluation indicated that she would not choose it again. "I think it was just kind of an added thing that is typical with the City. You have a lot of paperwork, a lot of stuff you have to do that no one really looks at."

While there might be value in completing a written self evaluation and be involved in peer review, for most of these teachers, it just wasn't practical. Furthermore, as the comment from the last quote suggests, it often seemed to these teachers that the process was top heavy in paperwork which no one reviewed from one year to the next, except for the summative evaluation after three years.

The nature of the relationship between the teacher and his or her administrator was another factor in the decision. Teachers who elected administrator evaluations had one of two experiences with it. Some expressed confidence in their administrators and valued the immediate feedback they received. "I like the feel of the Principal coming in the see what kind of job I'm actually doing. I feel it's more personal. When they do the write up on whatever they evaluated, they give me hints and clues on the areas of improvement that you need to do," commented an elementary teacher. Echoing this sentiment, another teacher said, "I find that the evaluation by the administrator is to the point. I get observed and they get to be able to see with their own eyes, what I can do." These teachers valued the immediate feedback they received following an observation.

Other teachers indicated that while they opted for administrative review, observations were often not completed. This lapse put the responsibility on the

administrator, rather than themselves. Some teachers also had concerns about the quality of the administration and administrative skills in evaluation, especially as many new, inexperienced administrators are being hired. One suggested the political nature of the evaluation process; whether one was "in or out" with the administration was a factor in determining which evaluation method to choose.

From the interviews it is clear that, neither administrative review or peer review were seen as ideal. While acknowledging the potential shortcomings of administrative evaluations, the teachers also perceived that peer evaluation could be less than impartial and that putting together a written document was no substitute for observed performance. A middle school teacher who has chosen the summative evaluation alternative put it this way:

> If you're realistic about it, you're going to choose people who are your friends and they're going to say okay, and most of the time they're not going to be as honest as an impartial person. Because you choose your own reviewers, so you're going to choose your friends.

An elementary teacher commented:

> I don't see it as an effective way of actually assessing a teacher's ability. Personally, I feel that anybody can put together a great project, and I've actually seen that in school. Anybody can put papers together, and people can write very well.

The skepticism teachers have about teacher evaluation extends to peer review among these newly tenured teachers. Many do not see it any more legitimate than administrative evaluation as captured by the following quote:

> I have pros and cons in both situations. I worked in another building where I had a difficult relationship with an administrator before I was tenured, ad as our professional relationships deteriorated, so did my observations. And by the end of the year I was in a bad situation, and the union helped me out very much. I transferred to another school , and had no problems from then on. All of a sudden I became a good teacher again.
>
> But on the other hand, I've also see some peer review documents, and it's like police policing police and doctors policing doctors. It's not honest. In some cases it is, we know who the great teachers are and we know the good teachers, and we know the teachers that aren't. And so I have some

qualms about peer review as well.

Teachers, both in this study, and in earlier studies who select peer review and take it seriously expressed the value they have found in thinking about their practice.[18] As a middle school teacher observed, "To review myself and say, you know I have this area to work on and this area, and they (peer reviewers) identified this last year and it's still a concern. And I think it serves me better to look at my own work." The union has an important role to play in continuing to develop a teacher evaluation process that will effectively address teaching quality which teachers see as valid. Some combination of administrative observation and peer review, a process used in Rochester for untenured teachers, may be the answer to the next generation of teacher evaluation for tenured teachers.

The Role of the Building Faculty Representative

The difference in views between teachers who have been involved with the union and those who have not deserves further consideration as it points to a critical, but potentially weak link in the union's organization -- the role of the building-level union representative. For many teachers the building level faculty representatives are the union and their perceptions of these individuals influence their perceptions of the union. Consequently, the role of the building level faculty representatives is important in the union's effort to broaden its purpose beyond the traditional functions of advocacy and negotiations. This reality seems to present a special challenge in implementing the union's focus on teaching quality as the faculty representative's role continues to be defined in terms of advocacy, with no formal expectation that faculty representatives be concerned with addressing teaching quality.

According to the Rochester Teachers Association written description, the faculty representative's duties include enrolling faculty as members; keeping faculty informed about

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[18] *Teaching in America: The Slow Revolution*, 1999.

RTA activities, services, achievements, and developments; representing fellow teachers' interests, needs, and wishes with the Association and/or with building administration; stimulating active participation in Association work among members; acting as a consultant to individual members; and keeping records and conducting elections.[19]

This formal description is closely reflected in the descriptions given by the two faculty representatives who were interviewed for this study. The middle school teacher, who is a faculty representative, discussed her position in terms of serving as a intermediator for the teachers:

> I look at my role as kind of the funnel to take everybody's collective complaints. Because we have a lot of young teachers, that do not feel comfortable at all going to their administrators or to the principal or vice principal, so they will come to me. I see myself as being a funnel of information and it kind of goes both ways. People come to me and want information about the contract and more often than not, because I am young and don't have a wealth of experience, I will send them to somebody who really has good answers.

Similarly, the other faculty representative, who was completing his first year as a representative at his high school, commented that his role involved "listening to the concerns of the other teachers and trying to figure out how I can help them. Also, a lot of it at this point is helping process paperwork and feeding information to teachers about what's going on with the union."

An analysis of the other teachers interviewed for the study reinforces this picture of the faculty representative's role, which is carried out with more or less skillfulness from building to building. Faculty representatives provide information about the union to its members and serve as the building-level advocate for teachers. It is a role which many

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[19]Rochester Teachers Association, "Overview of the Faculty Representatives' Duties,"n.d.

teachers view as undesirable, despite the benefit of being relieved from administrative and committee assignments. As a result, in many schools the same individuals serve as faculty representatives year after year, in positions which are largely uncontested. This means that representatives tend to be most skilled in their role as advocates -- as evidenced by the strong positive response expressed by teachers of their appreciation for their support -- but some may have become overly focused on teachers' rights to the exclusion of all else.

Additionally, some of the recently tenured teachers have a sense that there is a well entrenched union elite. A high school teacher, who is very positive about the union nevertheless commented, "They do a very good job, but they've also been there a very long time. So it's the upper echelon of the RTA. It's all the same people and it's been the same people for a very long time." Similarly an elementary teacher commented, "There is a clique within the RTA. They provide resources that without being a part of the core group, you don't have those connections. So it is an organization beyond an organization." At least in some buildings longtime representatives convey the impression that newer teachers have little to contribute. A very critical high school teacher offered this description: "They have their elite people that dictate what they'll do. And I'll tell you what, some of our reps, when we've been in meetings and I've spoken out, I get that big exhaust of air thing. And it's, 'What do you know? You're the new guy.'" This well-established group of representatives are an asset when called on to be advocates, but may be less helpful in moving the union to assume a greater role in issues of teaching quality.

The corollary to this observation is that who serves as representatives matters a great deal, particularly as new teachers form their views about the union and as the union makes efforts to involve new members. The middle school teacher who serves on his school's building committee observed:

> At one point I didn't have all that favorable an opinion of the union. And I think t had to do with a couple of personalities that I ran into at different times. And there are times when people in the union can be perceived as not

> wanting to do their job because of issues. And I didn't like that part of it. I felt like there's definitely room for discussion.
>
> And in the past couple of years, I've really changed my outlook just because I personally choose not to be adversarial at the outset. There's a tendency, I think, with some people to escalate and threaten, or take it for granted that there's going to be adversarial relationships when there isn't.

This teacher attributed his willingness to serve on the building committee directly to two senior teachers who were active unionists and who were highly respected as excellent teachers.

Role-set theory suggests that as social structures change, so do the social roles which support them. Thus far, the role of the faculty representative continues to be defined by the longstanding responsibilities of advocacy and negotiation. However, the strength of the belief among newly tenured teachers that their union should address teaching quality, in addition to being the teachers' advocate, suggests that if teaching quality is to become more central to the union's mission, the role of the faculty representative needs to be broadened or differentiated in some way. The RTA has negotiated Lead Teacher positions who fill roles which help to support the goal of teaching quality, particularly for first year teachers who are assigned a Lead Teacher Mentor. There is nothing, however, which sustains this focus at the school level for recently tenured teachers. Many are unaware of the existing efforts to address teaching quality.

There is a second reason for the RTA to find additional ways to focus its attention on teaching quality, its own future. The long tenured union leadership must look to its newer members to assume leadership responsibilities at every level, yet, the faculty representative role as currently configured is often not attracting new teachers. As important as advocacy might be, there are few teachers who want the job. The positive support expressed by newly tenured teachers for the union to address teaching quality offers another avenue to attract teachers to union work who might otherwise have ignored it.

Conclusion

It is increasingly clear that teaching quality is a key component to effective student learning. Teacher unions are critical in reframing the collective bargaining process to include issues of educational and teaching quality. AFT Vice President and TURN Director, Adam Urbanski, suggests, "Teachers unions will have to recognize that teachers will do well only if their students do well - and that no community would long tolerate teachers doing well while students do not. Thus, school productivity must become central to the mission of teachers unions, too."[20]

This study suggests the direction of the Teacher Union Reform Network and the focus on teaching quality is important to newly tenured teachers whose numbers are quickly increasing. The challenge will be for the union to make good on its promise of serving the dual functions of advocacy and quality control. Specifically, the union must look to reframing the role of the faculty representative to reflect this new mission while sustaining the historic role of advocacy.

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[20] Urbanski, "TURNing Unions Around," Contemporary Education, p. 190.

Appendix A
InterviewQuestions

1. How would you describe the role of the RTA and how it relates to your work as a teacher?

2. What two or three words best describe the Rochester Teachers Association?

3. What has influenced your views about the RTA?

4. What has influenced your views about teachers unions in general?

5. Do you think any changes need to be made by teachers' unions? If yes, what changes should be made?

6. Are you aware of any RTA efforts that go beyond traditional union activities? What specific activities can you identify?

7. What role should teachers and their unions play in evaluation and improving teaching quality? What do you think of NBPTS certification?

8. Are you aware of any RTA initiatives that are of interest to you? Are there any which you plan to become involved with either now or in the future?

9. Are you, or have you been, involved in any kind of union leadership activity, e.g. Faculty representative, RTA committee service, organizing RTA professional activities?

10. Why have you chosen to become involved, or to remain uninvolved, in the union?

11. Are there other professional associations which you belong to? What professional opportunities do they offer you?

12. What do you most want the RTA Executive Council to know as they plan for the future of the union?